¶The Relation of the Church to the Labor Movement

An Address

Given to the St. Paul Trades and Labor Assembly by Charles Stelzle, in the Central Presbyterian Church, St. Paul, Minn.

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WITH strong sympathy for the workingman, which comes as the result of having been a bread-winner since I was eleven years old, and having spent eight years as a machinist in the largest shop in New York City, it has been my privilege to present to minister' a ociations and to some of the lar urches in this country the side workingmen. I told the truth and my message was welcomed. I found an eagerness on the part of the churches to respond to the needs of workingmen.

But there is the other side—the side of the churches. I want to present it to the workingman. I shall be just as honest with you as I was with the churches. I want to point out some misapprehensions on your part as to what the Church is, and tell you what the Church has to do with the labor movement.

The Ideal Christian

I have talked with workingmen who believed that the Church is "a scheme

to increase the population of heaven." They thought that the sum and substance of the Church's teaching was this: "Be good; get saved; and you will go to heaven." But Jesus said, "He that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find (or save) it." The ideal Christian is not simply trying to get to heaven; he is trying to get other people there. Furthermore, he is trying to bring something of heaven into this sin-cursed earth.

Everyday Christianity

The Church has a great social mission. It is an institution which not only prepares men to die, but teaches them how to live. Unfortunately, some workingmen have thought of it as something which has to do only with sickness, death and cemeteries. Christianity believes in brighter homes, better schools, more beautiful cities and cleaner governments.

Jesus commanded men to go to Church, to study their Bibles, to spend time in prayer; but these were simply a means to an end. These are commanded so that men may be stronger to help their fellowmen. It is because men have obeyed Christ in this respect that we today have our Christian hospitals, asylums of various kinds, homes for the aged, and other helpful institu-

tions to minister to those who have been wounded in life's battle. Schools, colleges, libraries and training schools of every description supported by the Church or by Christian people indicate an interest in the preparation for life's larger duties. These institutions represent the Church at work, obeying the commands of her Christ.

The churches themselves have become centers for the social and intellectual life of the people as well as for the development of their spiritual life. Open every night and nearly all day, as many of them are, for concert courses and lecture series, free dispensary and savings bank, sewing-school and cooking class, boys' clubs and reading rooms, men's clubs and library, music classes and women's clubs, and everything else that is helpful and inspiring —so far as their means will permit, and the community demand—these all indicate that the Church has a vital interest in the "here and now" as well as in the "hereafter."

How Workingmen May Help

Sometimes workingmen have said that the Church is not doing enough for the needs of a certain community. They forget that as a rule the particular church which they are criticising is composed of their neighbors, who are no better off than they are themselves, but

who are striving to supply church privileges for the people living in the district. If the average workingman believes in the work of the Church, he can render his fellowmen a great service by helping it through his personal efforts. For the question of helping the people in the neighborhood is not so much a question of money as it is a problem of flesh and blood, viz.: the willingness of men to give themselves to the work of helping others. The high-thinking workingman best understands the needs of those with whom he associates and he can suggest many things to the minister who, with his cooperation, can carry out his practical plans for the betterment of the whole community. Almost any minister will gladly talk over with a workingman any plan that he may have for helping his fellowmen.

Do Rich Rascals Run the Church?

It has sometimes been said: "The Church is composed of hard-hearted employers who are always grinding out the lives of their employes." There are more than seventeen million Protestant church members in this country. Of Roman Catholics there are nine million more. Surely they are not all of the employing class! Sometimes the rich control the churches where they are in the majority, or where they have been

placed in official position by the members of the Church, but it does not always follow that because a man is rich he is hard-hearted and cruel. Furthermore, the poor man who has the necessary qualifications is usually given the place he deserves in the Church, because the Church is as ready to avail herself of a good man as is the merchant and the manufacturer.

It is admitted that some hard-hearted employers are in the Church. They have come in because of the good company they will get into. But they are not the Church. They are the parasites in the Church. They might better be out of it, so far as the good they do is concerned. "But," somebody says, "they are the men who support the Church." Don't you believe it! As a matter of fact our churches and great charities are supported by Christian men and women of small means.

When a rich man gives $10,000 to a Church the newspapers all over the country advertise it, and the impression has gotten out that the Church is supported mainly by ten thousand dollar donations.

No! the Church that you have been scorning is not the Church of the rich rascal! It is the Church of your godly mother. It is the Church of that man of God who has sympathized with the poor and the suffering! It is the Church

that has taken that man out of the gutter and placed him upon his feet!

I could present to you today, in any city in this land, thousands of men who have been saved from the power of sin and hell because they have accepted the Christ whom it offers. I challenge any man to say that he has honestly tried to live out the teachings of Christ and been disappointed!

What the Church Stands For

"The Church upholds and advocates the present industrial system," says somebody else. Any fair-minded man will admit that the present industrial system is not ideal. It will take a long time to make it so. But I would like to ask the men who say that the Church is responsible for the present system:

"How many sermons which endorse it have you heard during the past year? Not how many have you read, but how many have you actually *heard?*"

I have noticed that when a minister does say something that is against the labor union, or when he takes a side which he is not expected to take, every sheet in the country prints it. Why? because it's news. It's unusual. They rarely give the same publicity to the many good, helpful things that he says.

The Church does not stand for the present system of society if it is wrong. It stands only for so much of it as is in

accordance with the principles of Jesus Christ. The Church stands for no particular system of society, excepting a society in which all men deal righteously one with another.

Christ's Plan for Social Reform

Almost every social reformer claims Jesus Christ as the champion of his particular social system, and he criticises the Church because it does not boldly proclaim his particular theory. It has not yet been proven that any particular social theory, in its practical application, will bring about the golden age for which all good men are longing. Furthermore, the advocates of these systems are not clear in their own minds as to just what they want, or how their schemes will work out. The leading socialists have admitted that socialism is not ideal—it is simply a step in the right direction, they say. Is it not folly, then, to ask the Church to advocate a system which even its own advocates have not yet fully thought out?

Back of every honestly advocated social theory there is a great moral principle. Socialism demands "from every man according to his ability." That means a life of service. Communism demands the surrender of one's personal interest for the good of all. That means self-sacrifice. Anarchism demands the doing of right without the strong compelling arm of the law. That means justice, love, purity.

It will readily be seen that the success of any of these great social reform measures which are being presented to workingmen is dependent upon a high, unselfish character. Christianity makes a specialty of the development of this character. That is its chief business.

So the Church has a most important part in the great work which concerns the social life of mankind. It is not a political organization, but it supplies the material that strengthens such an organization. It manufactures the men who ought to bring about right conditions among men socially. The principle of Jesus Christ was ideal. He struck at evil, at sin. He tried to change men rather than methods. He did not advocate the reform measures of His day, because He knew that they were insufficient for the needs of the twentieth century. He taught that which will be applicable to every century. Socialism, communism, anarchism and every other "ism" heard of today will be back numbers one hundred years from now. Even the labor union idea will be improved upon. Hardly a book treating on political economy which was used in any university ten years ago is looked at today. It is out of date. There is only one book which is

always up to date—the Bible. It is always up to date because it came from God, and it is the only text-book on social questions which the Church officially recognizes.

Josh Billings once said: "Before you can have an honest horse race you must have an honest human race." Thus it is with all of these reform measures. Before you can bring about ideal conditions you must have ideal men. The Church is doing her part in moulding them, and no other organization is doing more in this direction.

Fighting Sin and Indifference

It is unfortunate that while very few workingmen reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God, they have thought of Him as coming on a purely social or economical mission. True, Christ came to free the slave of labor. But Christ also came to free the slave of sin. Indeed, that was His chief mission.

Christ Himself said: "I am come to call sinners to repentance." There is no greater obstacle in the way of solving the labor question than sin. If sin could be eradicated the labor question would be solved. Admitting this, you must see that the preacher who boldly performs his duty by denouncing sin in every form, the sin of both the employer and the employe, is a friend of labor, even though he never preaches a so-

called labor sermon. You know that very few workingmen would go to hear a labor sermon anyway. Would it not be rather a one-sided affair to preach to employers only, where one is discussing the labor question? I believe the average workingman steers clear of the Church because he is indifferent, not because the minister does not discuss the labor question. And indifference is the greatest curse of the workingman today. I am told by those who know that it has been necessary to force thousands of men into labor unions, even when such membership has been helpful, simply because many of these men were indifferent to their own interests. My advice to the workingman is, that he awake out of this indifference and fairly face his condition—physical, mental and moral. Find out wherein you are failing, then get right with God and with men.

A Life Linked with Christ's

There are some workingmen who complain that Christianity is narrow. As a matter of fact it is the broadest, the deepest, the highest thing in the world. Whenever the religion of Jesus Christ appears small, or narrow, or forbidding, remember that you are not dealing with the great system of Christianity but with some fragment which has been removed from it splace. Jesus

Christ constantly condemned the narrowness, and the dullness, and the sanctimoniousness of His time. You have no reason for repudiating all that some ignorant or narrow person does *not* know about Christ and His Church because of the little that he *does* know. You would not denounce labor unions because of the foolish and narrow things done by a few labor leaders. Jesus Christ came that men might have a more abundant life. It is this life which Christ can give that makes Christianity the greatest thing in the world. It is by having our lives linked with His, by a simple trust in His power to keep us, that we obtain this larger life. I cannot explain the process. All I know is that millions have come to Christ and simply asked Him to accept them with all their sins, and give them this larger life, which would take them out of all narrowness and meanness and sin, and Christ has done it. And He will do it for you.

It is because of this larger life that has come to men that Christianity has a vital interest in every phase of life. It has a vital interest in the labor question, because that concerns so many of those whom Christ loves. The Church which most truly represents Christ is the Church that ministers to all the needs of men, physical, intellectual, spiritual. It has already been pointed

out that the Church has these interests of men at heart.

How Christianity and the Labor Movement Are in Harmony

That, too, is the object of the labor union. According to the Constitution of the American Federation of Labor this is the pledge of the men who join it: "We are pledged to the emancipation of our class from poverty, ignorance and selfishness; to be respectful in word and action to every woman; to be considerate to the widow and the orphan, the weak and the defenceless; and never to discriminate against a fellow-worker on account of creed, color or nationality. To defend freedom of thought, whether expressed by tongue or pen. To educate ourselves and our fellow-workers in the history of the labor movement. We promise that we will never knowingly wrong a brother or see him wronged, if in our power to prevent it. We will endeavor to subordinate every selfish impulse to the task of elevating the material, intellectual and moral conditions of the entire laboring class."

Every Christian man and woman could subscribe to these principles. The Church is working to bring about these conditions, and has been doing so long before the labor union of today was in the field. Instead of there being a

separation between the workingmen and the Church, there should be the closest union. The Church needs workingmen. Christ wants them. But workingmen need the Church. I think that they haven't realized this as they should. Most of them think that they are quite independent of Christ and the Church.

Christ's Influence in the Industrial World

Listen: The ancient philosophers said that "a purchased laborer is better than a hired one,'" "a workshop in incompatible with nobility." And in accordance with these principles they erected great prison-like structures in which they hid away the laborer, and they compelled half the world to live in slavery. It would make interesting reading to know how that "other half" lived. Then came Jesus Christ. Standards changed. Jesus discovered the individual. He showed the world how highly God valued a human soul. Men caught His spirit, with the result that in every Christian land the standing of the laborer has been elevated. It has taken a long time, and conditions are not yet ideal; but the principles of Jesus Christ applied to society are responsible for the great advance made by the workingman since the day that he was a miserable slave.

The Foundation of Labor's Success

The success of the labor movement is due to the fact that Christianity has blazed the way. It needed the missionary of the cross; it needed Christian civilization to go before and prepare the

foundation. Then came the labor agitator and built upon the foundation laid by Christ and His Church, many years before. And, strange to say, after the superstructure had been raised, the building looked down on the foundation which gave it support and cursed it!

Suppose the foundation should suddenly be removed. Suppose the Church and the conditions brought about through its influence should suddenly be wiped out? A city without a church! Would you care to live in it? A city full of saloons, gambling hells, and places of vile resort of every description, alluring your sons and your daughters to certain destruction! For I have noticed that when the Church is absent these are in evidence, and when the Church is present these rapidly increase.

Would Workingmen Abolish the Church?

Do you think that if a vote should be taken among workingmen as to whether or not all the churches should be given up they would vote "Yes"? I think not. I believe that the average workingman reveres the Church, and I sometimes think it is because of this love that he has become impatient with it on account of some fancied indifference as to his social condition.

As a company of workingmen were about to be dispersed by the police at a mass meeting for the unemployed the leader proposed, "Three cheers for Jesus Christ!" The heartiness with which they were given proved that down deep in the heart of the man who has become bitter against the Church and against society there is a high regard for Jesus, the friend of the workingman.

A Backward Glance and a Prophecy

When the Church was started two thousand years ago, it was organized by a company of workingmen. Its leader was a carpenter. When it spread to other cities it was received most cordially by the workingmen who formed the great labor guilds of the day—the labor unions we would now call them. And it is not impossible that Jesus Himself was a member of a carpenters' guild in Nazareth.

I can see no reason why workingmen should not again rally around the Church of Christ, accepting Him as their leader and their champion. I believe the day is approaching when this will come to pass: when with the power that can come alone from Him, the pledge of the unionist and the vow of the Christian, looking toward the complete emancipation of the whole body of workingmen, physical, mental and moral, will be lived out for the sake of our brother men.

Leaflets by Charles Stelzle.

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